

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, July 27, 2014

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on the Gospel Reading for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom Iwanowski.

THRILLED!

A senior in high school decides to apply to Princeton University. She not only receives a letter of acceptance from the Ivy League school but also a full scholarship including room and board.

A newcomer to politics throws his hat into the ring and runs for state senate as a write-in candidate. Amazingly he wins the election and is chosen to represent his district.

Both persons would be thrilled at their good fortune. In fact, they would be ready to jump out of their skins! In this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 13:44-45) we meet a farm worker and a merchant who are also blessed with good fortune.

The farm worker is plowing a field when suddenly the blade of his plow hits buried treasure. Rejoicing in his find, the worker sells all he has and buys the field so the treasure might be his.

A jewelry merchant searching for the perfect pearl finally discovers it. He willingly sells all he has so he can have the joy of owning the pearl of his dreams.

Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like that treasure, like that pearl.

If that is the case then being part of that kingdom should make us at least as happy and thrilled as a person who finds something of immense value or who finally gains what he or she has been relentlessly seeking. Or to use our more contemporary examples, having a place in the kingdom of heaven should make us as joyful as a student accepted into the school of her dreams or as a political candidate whose victory even surprised him!

Yet such joy and excitement does not seem evident on the faces of many Christians.

We might suppose that such emotion will come later when God calls us to himself and judges us worthy to enter the glory of heaven. Yet Jesus does not speak of the kingdom of heaven as something that awaits us only after this life

Jesus speaks of the kingdom as a present reality. For example, he says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17). The kingdom is not just in the future. The treasure can be found now. The pearl can be discovered today.

The kingdom of heaven is found when we truly believe in God's unconditional love for us; when we recognize the poor and the powerless as part of our human family; when we see things from the perspective of the Gospel; when we realize that fulfillment and peace come not from what we possess but from what we share; when we understand that God is not hiding in the clouds but active in the messiness of this world.

In short, the kingdom of heaven is found when we have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that guides our life.

There may be a simple reason why many Christians do not seem to be filled with the joy that Jesus speaks of in Sunday's Gospel - the joy of the farmer who uncovers a buried treasure and the merchant who finds the pearl of great price. Perhaps they have yet to discover the kingdom of heaven.

When we find that kingdom, the joy will show in our lives. As Pope Francis put it, "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #1)

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